

Why 100 feet?

CAL FIRE kicks off prevention campaign to educate the public about Defensible Space

By Michael Jarvis, deputy director, Communications, Sacramento Headquarters

To kick off Wildfire Awareness Week 2006, CAL FIRE bestowed the title of All Star Firefighter to “Tonight Show” musician Kevin Eubanks on May 10 in Ventura County.

Eubanks, the bandleader and guitarist on “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno,” became a public advocate for firefighters and public safety after the September and October 2006 Topanga Fire scorched more than 25,000 acres in Ventura and Los Angeles counties. Despite its size and proximity to homes in the area of the fire, only three residences were destroyed in the Topanga fire due to the hard work of firefighters from throughout the state. Another major factor in the Topanga fire success story was Ventura County – which is rec-

ognized by CAL FIRE as a model for fire prevention -- thanks to its successful planning and fire hazard reduction programs.

Eubanks truly is an “all star” not only for donating his name and image to the cause but for taking the time for numerous interviews with Southern California media about his personal experience with the Topanga fire. Not only did he encourage Californians to get involved in fire safety and to practice defensible space but Eubanks also stayed after the event to pose for pictures with firefighters who attended the event from Ventura, Los Angeles and throughout the state. Later that night on “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno,” Eubanks wore his CAL FIRE Nomex as well as a Los Angeles Fire Department hat and briefly discussed Wildfire Awareness Week with Leno, who ribbed him about being a volunteer firefighter.

Last year Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger signed a proclamation officially recognizing May 7-13 as “Wildfire Awareness Week” in California. “Wildfire Awareness Week is a valuable opportunity for California’s fire agencies and communities to reduce the risk of wildfire and increase public safety and environmental health,” the governor announced in his proclamation.

An Aggressive Campaign –

As the governor recognized Wildfire Awareness Week, CAL FIRE kicked off a public information campaign to remind residents of the 2005 state law that extends the “Defensible Space” distance to 100 feet. CAL FIRE initiated its “Why 100 feet?” campaign to inform the public about the importance of the change to Public Resources Code 4291.

As part of its campaign, CAL FIRE’s Communications office issued thousands of brochures to units statewide to focus on defensible space. This campaign has been powered by the strength and experience of firefighters, inspectors, fire prevention specialists and Volunteers In Prevention (VIP) as well as the local and state partners with CAL FIRE.

This year CAL FIRE rolled out a variety of physiological techniques and devices to grab the public’s attention:

Billboards –

Southern California advertising company, Lamar Advertising has



Above, the Tonight Show’s Kevin Eubanks poses with CAL FIRE firefighters.

Right, motorist on I-10 pass a CAL FIRE billboard in Riverside.



donated billboard space throughout Southern California to CAL FIRE. The billboards are simple. They read "Why 100 feet?" in bold white letters with a black background. The only other images on the billboard are the CAL FIRE logo and the CAL FIRE website. The idea is to catch people's attention and have them want to go to the website for more information.

3-D Fridge Magnets – Lenticular magnets present three-dimensional images that change when moved or observed from different vantage points. It is a technique similar to the prize cards that were often inside a box of Cracker Jacks. CAL FIRE developed a lenticular that shows a home that is properly landscaped with defensible space, then shows the same home overrun with vegetation, and finally, the same home fully engulfed in flames.

Scratch 'n' Sniff cards – CAL FIRE licensed a patented technique that makes a postcard-sized handout that smells like a burned home. The scent is a disturbing reminder for those who have suffered from fires but serves as an ominous warning to those who don't practice fire safety. The cards have been well received by all (not counting a bomb-sniffing dog named Ruby at the Sacramento Airport).

Web site movies – The department placed short movies on its site to bring emotional and compelling visuals and sounds to the public. The short films use animation to bring to life the same information located on the defensible space handouts. The site also utilizes a list of more than 100 personal artifacts and valuables that will be irreplaceable in the event of a fire. Hopefully

the list will make homeowners consider the implications of a fire.

Fire prevention is crucial – When property owners remove unnecessary vegetation it saves lives, property and the environment. Residents must complying with the new rule that requires

property owners to cut vegetation within 100 feet of their homes and structures. Before the new law went into effect in January 2005, the defensible space requirement around structures and homes was set at 30 feet. Now it's 100 feet, which means residents living in the State Responsibility Areas must take steps to reduce the risk of a fire spreading.

The 30 feet nearest to the structure is the Lean, Clean, and Green Zone. This area requires the greatest reduction in flammable vegetation. The amount of cleanup needed in the Fuel Reduction Zone in the remaining 70 feet (or to the property line) will depend on the grade of the property and the vegetation. In this zone, spacing between plants and the removal of "ladder" fuels and lower limbs beneath large trees is critical.

CAL FIRE encourages property and homeowners to remove dry, dying or dead vegetation early instead of later in the year when the grass and brush dries



A display of some of the new CAL FIRE Defensible Space publications.

out and becomes a major fire hazard. Most units are emphasizing that lawn mowing should NOT occur after 10 a.m. when conditions pose an extreme fire risk. Additionally, it is very important that homeowners make sure to remove any build-up of leaves, needles, or debris from gutters and roofs. The law also requires that tree limbs are trimmed at least 10 feet from any chimney and dead limbs that hang over homes or garages be removed.

Proper clearance and other fire resistant measures dramatically increase a home's chance of surviving a wildfire. Firefighters also must have room to work to suppress a structure or wildfire from spreading without posing unreasonable threats to the thier lives. Share the message of fire safety to save lives.

*For more on the
Why 100 feet? campaign
or Defensible Space
www.fire.ca.gov*